Spring 5-2010

Chinese Music as a Narrative Model: The Aesthetics of Liu Liu and Metafiction in Samuel Beckett's Dream of Fair to Middling Women

Lidan Lin
Indiana University - Purdue University Fort Wayne, linl@ipfw.edu

Volume 91 Number 3 May 2010 ISSN 0013-838X

English Studies

A Journal of English Language and Literature

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

English Studies

A Journal of English Language and Literature

Aims and Scope

The periodical *English Studies* was founded more than 75 years ago by the Dutch grammarian R.W. Zandvoort. From the very first, linguistics was only one of its areas of interest. *English Studies* was and is a unique publication in the field of "English" because of its range: it covers the language and literature of the English-speaking world from the Old English period to the present day. In spite of this range, the foremost position of *English Studies* in many of these areas is undisputed: it attracts contributions from leading experts who recognise this periodical as the most obvious vehicle for addressing both their fellow-experts and those whose professional interest in "English" is more general. The six or seven articles in each issue are supplemented by 10 to 15 substantial reviews of carefully selected publications, and annual surveys of the most important works in the fields of English and American poetry, drama and the novel, and of key literary critical studies keep readers informed of recent developments. *English Studies* is a European periodical (and, we are proud to add, by far the largest bimonthly of this nature outside England and America). It is edited from The Netherlands while its advisory board of editors consists of scholars from a great number of European countries, and its subscribers are scattered all over the globe.

Submission

See inside back cover for guidelines. Contributions from Norway should be sent to Prof. L.E. Breivik, Department of English, University of Bergen, P.O. Box 7805, N-5020 Bergen, email Breivik@eng.uib.no; from Switzerland to Prof. W. Brönnimann, Wiesengrundstrasse 15, 4132 Muttenz, email Werner.Broennimann@unibas.ch; from Holland to Prof. Dr. J. Gerritsen, Troelstralaan 97, 9722 JH Groningen; from the U.S.A. to Prof. M. Hunt, Department of English, Baylor University, One Bear Place #97404, Waco, Texas 76798-7404, email Maurice_Hunt@baylor.edu; from the U.K. and Ireland to Prof. H. Magennis, Department of English, Queen's University Belfast, Belfast, BT7 1NN, Northern Ireland, email H.Magennis@qub.ac.uk; From Germany to Professor Vera Nünning, Department of English, University of Heidelberg, Kettengasse 12, 69117 Heidelberg, email Vera.Nuenning@urz.uni-heidelberg.de; from Denmark to Prof. B. Preisler, University of Roskilde, Department of Languages and Culture 3.2.4, P.O. Box 260, 4000 Roskilde, email Preisler@ruc.dk; from Finland to Prof. J. Rudanko, Department of English, University of Tampere, Kalevantie 4, FIN 33014 Tampere, email Juhani.Rudanko@uta.fi; from Sweden to Prof. M. Thormählen, Centre for Languages and Literature, English Department, University of Lund, P.O. Box 201, SE 22100 Lund, email Marianne.Thormahlen@englund.lu.se; from Belgium to Prof. Dr. K. Versluys, Vakgroep Engels, Universiteit Gent, Rozier 44, B-9000, Gent, email Kristiaan.Versluys@UGent.be. **Books for review** and contributions from other countries should be sent to Prof. Dr. Odin Dekkers, Department of English, Faculty of Arts, University of Nijmegen, P.O. Box 9103, 6500 HD Nijmegen, The Netherlands, email ES@let.ru.nl

English Studies

Volume 91 Number 3 May 2010

Fielding, Henry. *Joseph Andrews.* (1742). Edited by Martin C. Battestin. Middleton, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1967.
Gamage, William. *Linsi-woolsie. Or Two Centuries of Epigrammes.* Oxford, 1613.
Gray, Floyd. *Gender, Rhetoric, and Print Culture in French Renaissance Writing.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
Grey, Richard. *Memoria Technica: Or, a New Method of Artificial Memory.* London, 1730.
Guardian 39, 25 April 1713. In *The Guardian.* Vol. 1. London, 1806.
Hale, Mathew. *The History of the Common Law of England.* Edited by Charles M. Gray. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1971.
Harris, James. *Three Treatises: The First Concerning Art, the Second Concerning Music, Painting, and Poetry, the Third Concerning Happiness.* 2nd ed. London, 1765.
Hervey, James. *Theron and Aspasio: Or, a Series of Dialogues and Letters.* (1755). Vol. 1. Dublin, 1756.
Hume, David. "Of Money." (1752). In *Essays and Treatises.* Vol. 1. Edinburgh, 1825.
———. *History of England.* (1754–62). Vol. 5. Indianapolis, Ind.: Liberty Fund, 1983.
Johnson, Samuel. "Life of Waller." In *Lives of the English Poets.* Edited by G. B. Hill. Vol. 1. Oxford, 1905.
———. *The Rambler.* In the Yale Edition of the Johnson's *Works.* Edited by W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss. Vol. 5. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969.
Jordanes. *Origins and Deeds of the Goths.* Available from www.thelatinlibrary.com/iordanes1.html#IV (Accessed 16 October 2009).
Le Sage, Alaine René. *The Adventures of Gil Blas of Santillane.* Edited by T. Smollett. Vol. 1. London, 1780.
Lewis, John. *History and Antiquities ... of Tenet.* 2nd ed. London, 1736.
Lustig, Irma S., ed. *Boswell: Citizen of the World, Man of Letters.* Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1995.
Mandeville, Bernard. *Enquiry into the Causes of the Frequent Executions at Tyburn ....* London, 1725.
[Mendez, Moses]. *The Chaplet: A Musical Entertainment.* (1749). London, 1753.
The Musical Miscellany. Vol. 2. London, 1729.
Osborne, Francis. *Advice to a Son.* Oxford, 1656.
Plutarch's Lives. Translated by R. Duke. Vol. 1. London, 1701.
Pottle, Frederick A. Review of *The Hypochondriak. Saturday Review of Literature,* 1 September 1928, 88.
Prior, Matthew. *Solomon.* (1718). In *The Poetical Works of Matthew Prior.* Vol. 2. Boston: Little, Brown, 1860.
Saintsbury, George. Review of *The Hypochondriak. The Dial* (October 1928): 353–5.
Taylor, R. V. *Supplement to the Biographia Leodiensis; Or, Biographical Sketches of the Worthies of Leeds.* London, 1867.
Tillotson, John. "The Lawfulness and Obligations of Oaths." (1681). In *Works.* Vol. 2. London, 1820.
T. W. *Dying Merrily: or, Historical and Critical Reflexions on the Conduct of Great Men in all Ages; Who, in their last Moments, mocked Death, and died facetiously.* London, 1745.
Waller, Edmund. *Poems.* 10th ed. London, 1722.
Watts, I[saac]. *An Humble Attempt.* London, 1731.
Webster, John. *The White Devil.* London. (1612). Edited by John Russell Brown. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996.
[Wesley, John]. "On the Trinity." (1775). London, 1783.
Works of Lucian. Translated by Several Eminent Hands. Vol. 2. London, 1710.

English Studies
Vol. 91, No. 3, May 2010, 289–302

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Chinese Music as a Narrative Model: The Aesthetics of Liu Liu and Metafiction in Samuel Beckett's *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*

Lidan Lin

This article freshly reveals that Beckett's experiment with metafiction began with his first novel and was inspired by his knowledge of Chinese music, which he obtained from Laloy. From the ways in which Chinese music developed from obeying formula to gaining freedom of expression, Beckett ingeniously perceived a narrative model: just as Chinese music must break free of the theory of liu liu *to embrace the freedom of expression, English fiction must reinvent the nineteenth-century realist formula, in which authors like Balzac and Austen exercised rigid control over their plots and characters. The outcome of Beckett's appropriation of Chinese music is a metafictional novel that is usually seen as belonging to postmodern fiction. Yet, Beckett's attack on literary realism does not result in the total negation of the real, but in viewing the real as fundamentally mystic. In this sense, Beckett may be called a "mystic realist". Thus Beckett's own aesthetics emerges in his simultaneous negotiations with realism and postmodernism. These negotiations are also inspired by the legacy of Proust and Joyce: the legacy of inner fiction.*

Although Samuel Beckett's experiment with postmodern metafiction is indebted to his knowledge of Chinese music and began with his first novel *Dream of Fair to Middling Women,*[1] critics have largely neglected this important topic—they have focused mainly on Beckett's application of metafiction in *Trilogy* (1958) and post-*Trilogy* works. Inger Christensen, for example, devotes a chapter in his book *The Meaning of Metafiction* (1981) to the study of Beckett's application of metafiction in *Trilogy* and focuses on the unstable narrator-narratee relationship. This study is followed by Susan Brienza's book-length study *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds: Style in Metafiction* (1987), which examines Beckett's use of metafiction in his post-*Trilogy*

Lidan Lin is Professor of English Literature at Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne, USA, and Visiting Professor of English Literature at Southwest University, China.
[1]*Dream* hereafter, posthumously published in 1992. All references are to this edition.

ISSN 0013 838X (print)/ISSN 1744-4217 (online)

works.[2] This essay will fill this neglected gap by exploring the ways in which Beckett appropriates Chinese music as a narrative model to parody nineteenth-century realist fiction that largely represents the outer reality. In experimenting with metafiction, Beckett not only inherited the modernist legacy of Marcel Proust and James Joyce, the legacy of "inner fiction" that emphasizes fiction's ability to represent the inner flow of consciousness and involuntary memory, but he creatively pushed that legacy further into the postmodern domain by turning the modernist question of epistemology into the postmodernist question of ontology.[3] Yet Beckett's postmodern negotiation with realist fiction results not in the total negation or endless deferral of the real, but in affirming the real as being mystic and ineffable, just as Proust does in *Remembrance of Things Past*, thus irreducible to logical and neat identification.[4]

Dream is, no doubt, one of the most experimental novels ever written in English, comparable to Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927).[5] Throughout the novel Beckett's meta-narrator frequently intervenes to deplore the failure of the novel-in-progress and the failure of nineteenth-century realist fiction represented by such authors as Jane Austen and Honoré de Balzac. At the same time, the meta-narrator introduces a new way of writing fiction that calls for the release of authorial control so that the characters and plots can be free to develop themselves. In this new way, the meta-narrator believes, the narrative events have a better chance to resemble real life, and the characters have a better chance to appear as real, living human beings, instead of mechanic, lifeless puppets found in the fiction of Austen and Balzac. Interestingly, Beckett's experiment with metafiction is inspired by a book he read about Chinese music. As *Beckett's Dream Notebook* shows, Beckett read Louis Laloy's *La Musique Chinoise*, originally published in French *c.* 1900, in which Laloy tells of a legend about how Chinese music was first invented. The Chinese Emperor Hoang-ti wished to have musical notes invented, and he sent his music master to the northern part of China to look for these notes. The music master successfully accomplished his task, and this is how he accomplished it. At the end of a deserted valley, he cut a bamboo stem between two knots, blew on it, and produced a tone. Then two phoenixes, one male, one female, came out and rested on a tree. The male

[2]Brienza, *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds*. For a more recent study of Samuel Beckett's application of metafiction, see Landa.

[3]I use Brian McHale's distinction between modernist and postmodernist fiction developed in his highly influential book *Postmodernist Fiction*. As he writes: "I will formulate it as a general thesis about modernist and postmodernist fiction: the dominant of modernist fiction is *epistemological*. That is, modernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions such as those mentioned by Dick Higgins in my epigraph: 'How can I interpret this world of which I am a part?' The dominant of postmodernist fiction is ontological. That is, postmodernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions like the ones Dick Higgins calls 'post-cognitive': 'which world is this? What is to be done in it?'" (McHale, 9–10).

[4]Proust.

[5]Joyce; Woolf. In John Pilling's view, Beckett's English fiction could have been more popular if written in a more accessible style. As he writes: "Beckett's English fiction, for all its many virtues ... can legitimately be seen as a forced growth: extremely ambitious, courageously experimental, but a little too exotic ... to take root and be widely admired" (Pilling, 18).

phoenix sang six notes coming from the same tone of the music master, and the female phoenix sang six different notes. Having listened to the twelve notes, the music master cut eleven other bamboo tubes and responded to all of them. This is how Chinese musical theory began: it began with these twelve notes called *liu*, each of which represents a fixed tone and value. Not only did Beckett find this legend intriguing, but he perceptively detected a parallel between Chinese musical theory and nineteenth-century realist fiction: just as Chinese *liu liu* were made to represent a stable tone and value, the plots and characters in nineteenth-century fiction were planned to fit the established narrative convention. However, Chinese music, like European music, did not stay a slave to its theory for long, and it successfully surpassed the limits of the original theory to allow music the freedom of expression, though such freedom evolved gradually. As Laloy writes:

> It seems that the primitive arts are also the most formalistic, that the freedom of invention has grown with a continuous progress, and that the human mind proceeds always from the abstract to the concrete. ... That which is certain is that Chinese music began by being formulaic, but with a science which agreed with its sentiment, and reinforced it in place of restraining or bending it.[6]

From the gradual evolution of Chinese music Beckett perceived yet another parallel between Chinese music and English fiction: just as Chinese music grew out of the rigid formula to embrace the freedom of invention, so English fiction must break free from the narrative convention of the nineteenth century to welcome the freedom of experiment.

Of course, Beckett knew that authors like Proust and Joyce had already pioneered in challenging realist fiction. An admirer of both authors, Beckett consciously or unconsciously imitated both authors; as a result, *Dream* embodies Proustian and Joycean resonances. One Proustian resonance in *Dream* is Proust's critique of habit that governs every aspect of human life and his perception of reality as being mystic, rather than predictable or logical. Beckett pushed this Proustian idea further by showing, through meta-narrative negotiations, that reality is so mysterious and unpredictable that the writer will fail if he/she abides by the nineteenth-century narrative conventions. The Joycean echo is discernible in Beckett's imitation of the Joycean technique of note-snatching or pastiche, in which both authors use materials taken from other authors without indicating sources. As a result, their fiction, particularly *Ulysses* and *Dream*, is highly allusive and demanding to the reader. It is precisely Joyce's note-snatching technique that led Beckett to borrow verbatim the story of *liu liu* from Laloy's book and to use it as the meta-narrative frame for the novel.[7]

[6]Laloy, *La Musique*, 21.

[7]Beckett's admiration for Marcel Proust is clearly articulated in his book-length essay *Proust*, in which Beckett praises Proust's understanding of reality as being mystic. As Beckett writes: "It [voluntary memory] has no interest in the **mysterious** element of inattention that colors our most commonplace experiences" (19, emphasis added). Involuntary memory, on the other hand, is like "an unruly **magician**" performing "the performance of its **miracle**;" it is like the "music of Vinteuil and the **magical** prose of Bergotte" (21, emphasis added).

In addition to the legacy of Proust and Joyce and his own creative ingenuity, Beckett had another edge to his advantage when he wrote *Dream* in 1932 in Paris: he was surrounded by academic and publication success. He had been awarded Scholars of the House, the highest award an undergraduate could achieve at Trinity College, Dublin, and he came top in his class in the examination in Modern Literature. His outstanding academic record led to his nomination in 1927 for the exchange lecturer in English at École Normale Supérieure in Paris. By 1932, Beckett had published three pieces: an essay "Dante ... Bruno. Vico ... Joyce" (1929), a poem, "Whoroscope" (1930), and a piece of literary criticism *Proust* (1931).[8] Having acquired such erudite background in literature, Beckett expected his first novel to be a success so that he could pursue a literary career from which to earn a living, rather than the ones his parents wanted him to seek.[9] In order to ensure that success, Beckett diligently did his homework: he read widely and took detailed notes from his reading to prepare himself for writing *Dream*, as evidenced by *Beckett's Dream Notebook*, which recorded his reading notes. However, despite his talent and hard work, no publisher in Paris, Dublin, or London was willing to take the risk to publish *Dream* because of the novel's exotic theme and experimental narrative style, and the result is that the genius Beckett had written an unpublishable novel. But Beckett had to publish it because of his dire need and determination to be a fiction writer, and the new result is the publication of *More Pricks than Kicks* (1934), a collection of short stories adapted from *Dream* after Beckett had made major thematic and stylistic compromises.[10] Beckett's tactful compromise to the novelistic convention and the publishing industry is also discernible in *Murphy* (1938) and *Watt* (1953), in which Beckett strategically opted for more conventional motifs and narrative styles.[11] It is not until *Trilogy* (1958) that Beckett began to return to metafiction.

Dream tells the story of Belacqua Shuah, a young Irish apprentice writer. Shy, unmacho, passive, and indolent, Belacqua is portrayed as a "sentimental purist".[12] One of his dreams is to avoid the big world as much as possible and stay intact in the inner stratum of his being—the womb-tomb—where he can be free from the hassle and temptation of the big world. His other dream is to engage in a purely spiritual and non-sexual relationship with women. Belacqua doesn't always succeed in realizing either dream. As the narrator reveals, Belacqua constantly shifts between the three layers of his being. The surface layer represents his ordinary life, of which he has

Beckett concludes that Proust's entire book (*A la recherche du temps perduis*) is informed by his entrance into a mystic experience: "Proust has adopted this **mystic** experience as the Leitmotiv of his composition" (22, emphasis added). Beckett's admiration for James Joyce is reflected in his essay "Dante ... Bruno. Vico ... Joyce," in which Beckett highly praises Joyce's stylistic experiment in his work-in-progress later published as *Finnegan's Wake*, an experiment that conflates form and content.

[8]Beckett, "Dante ... Bruno," "Whoroscope," *Proust*.

[9]For Beckett's difficulty with his parents about his career, see Knowlson, 81.

[10]Beckett, *More Pricks than Kicks*.

[11]For Beckett's negotiation with the publishing industry concerning the composition and publication of *Murphy*, see Lin.

[12]Beckett, *Dream*, 101.

little control, like his "chase [of the Smeraldina-Rima] to Vienna and [his] flight [from her] to Paris."[13] The middle layer represents a part of his daily life, of which he can exercise some control; he could, for example, wilfully imagine the sensualist Syra-Cusa turned into "a saint", and "have [the Smeraldina-Rima] according to his [purist] God."[14] He could even perform the "dirty confusion"[15] by mingling the two women. But, as the narrator tells us, Belacqua is reluctant to inhabit in these two strata of his being; the only place he wishes to dwell in is the depth layer of his being, which appears like an enclosed "tunnel"[16] completely sealed off from the outside world. Belacqua's relationship with women, as his relationship with the big world, equally disturbs him. Although he adamantly rejects a sexual relationship with women, he passionately yearns for their company. Ironically, Belacqua never fares well with his lovers for long and invariably ends with disappointing break-ups because all these women demand sexual intimacy while he can only "clap a chaste kiss"[17] at the most when he is up to it. To bring Belacqua to fulfil their erotic needs, these women appear as aggressive suitresses: Miranda being described as a "predator" and a "masochist",[18] and the Smeraldina-Rima being described as a rapist.[19] Even the less predatory and somewhat enlightened Alba blasts Belacqua with her violent curses of his notion of purity.[20] While these women all take on an active wooing part usually associated with the male in a heterosexual relationship, Belacqua displays a distinctly passive response usually associated with the female.

The story of Belacqua would have been acceptable in realist fiction, in which the all-knowing authors would have no doubts about the stories they tell. For Beckett, however, the story of Belacqua and the narrative events revolving around him are by no means credible. Such incredibility is constantly stressed by the meta-narrator, who insists on the impossibility to present the real Belacqua, who simply appears as a "cubic unknown",[21] and thus laments the failure of the author. Aided by Laloy and Chinese music, Beckett's postmodern negotiation with realist fiction begins early in the novel, when the narrator just finishes the account of Belacqua's farewell to his lover, the Smeraldina-Rima, a German-speaking student of music. The narrator then switches to the role of meta-narrator and issues the first warning that the author does not know how the rest of the story will continue because some characters will not obey the author's will; that is, they cannot be made to stand for something: "The fact of the matter is we do not quite know where we are in this story. It is possible that

[13]Ibid., 120.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Ibid.

[16]Ibid., 45.

[17]Ibid., 237.

[18]Ibid., 11.

[19]Ibid., 18.

[20]Ibid., 195. Beckett's unflattering portrayal of women in *Dream* and elsewhere has incurred vehement criticism by feminist critics, who find Beckett's treatment of women troubling. See Ben-Zvi, ed.; Brienza, "Clods, Whores and Bitches"; Bryden, *Women*.

[21]Beckett, *Dream*, 124.

some of our creatures will do their dope all right and give no trouble. And it is certain that others will not. Let us suppose that Nemo is one of those that will not."[22] Beckett's meta-narrator then turns to Chinese music for help:

> Supposing we told a little story about China in order to orchestrate what we mean. Yes? Ling-Lung [the Emperor's music master] then, let us say, went to the confines of the West, to Bamboo Valley, and having cut there a stem between two knots and blown into same was charmed to constate that it gave forth the sound of his own voice when he spoke, as he mostly did, without passion. From this the phoenix male had the kindness to sing six notes and the phoenix female six other notes and Ling-Lung the minister cut yet eleven stems to correspond with all that he has heard. Then he remitted the twelve liu-liu to his master, the six liu male phoenix and the six liu female phoenix: the Yellow Bell, let us say, the Great Liu, the Great Steepleiron, the Stifled Bell, the Ancient Purification, the Young Liu, the Beneficent Fecundity, the Bell of the Woods, the Equable Rule, the Southern Liu, the Imperfect, the Echo Bell.[23]

Being fluent in English and French, Beckett provided his own English translation of the above passage. For Beckett, the fictional characters of the nineteenth century resemble these *liu liu* in so far as they are conceived of and planned by the author, who has their entire life and destiny figured out even before they appear in the novel, just as *liu liu* were made to represent a fixed tone and value. But Beckett also knew that Chinese music managed to gradually shrug off the rigid formula of *liu liu* to allow the freedom of invention. Laloy describes this process of evolution in the beginning of Chapter Four of his book, which is placed immediately before the above passage:

> Placed in charge of the public morale, the Chinese music has had, from its most tender age, discernment of the allowable and the forbidden. The Occidental imagination is pleased to see the arts as guided, at their beginnings, solely by fantasy, which theory must convert into formulas. That is a fiction of innocence, like that of the earthly paradise, but which is imposed by no dogma: Nothing proves that things have happened thus, quite on the contrary. It seems that the primitive arts are also the most formalistic, that the freedom of invention had grown with a continuous progress, and that the human mind proceeds always from the abstract to the concrete.
>
> That which is certain is that the Chinese music began by being formulaic, but with a science which agreed with its sentiment, and reinforced it in place of restraining or bending it.[24]

From these two passages, which demonstrate the development of Chinese music from being guided by theory to reinforcing the freedom of sentiment, Beckett saw the possibility to use Chinese music as a narrative model for *Dream*: just as Chinese

[22]Ibid., 9.
[23]bid., 10.
[24]Laloy, *La Musique*, 21. For more information on Louis Laloy's relationship to China, see Laloy, *Mirror of China*, and *Louis Laloy on Debussy*; see also Priest.

music evolved from the formula of *liu liu* to gaining the freedom of invention, the novel must expand the narrative convention of the nineteenth century in order to dramatize the characters and events as naturally as possible, rather than what the author orchestrates. In order to illustrate the limits of realist fiction, the meta-narrator assigns each character to one of the twelve liu notes, for example, John as Yellow Bell, the Smeraldina-Rima as the Young Liu and so on and so forth. In this way, the meta-narrator assures, mockingly, one can easily write a novel one gets from one's "favorite novelist":[25] "If all our characters were like that—liu liu-minded—we could write a little book that would be purely melodic, think how nice that would be, linear, a lovely Pythagorean chain-chant solo of cause and effect."[26] However, the meta-narrator immediately questions such an easy approach to fiction by stating that not all characters in the novel can correspond to a *liu*; Nemo, for example, "will not for any consideration be condensed into a *liu*, who is not a note but the most regrettable simultaneity of notes."[27] Belacqua, "the principal boy",[28] will not either. Like Nemo, Belacqua is "symphonic", rather than melodic, and represents the simultaneity of notes; he is even "bi-sexual".[29]

After Belacqua joins the Smeraldina-Rima in Vienna, their relationship goes well for a while until she unexpectedly "raped" him.[30] Tiffs began, and the two lovers eventually break up, with Belacqua walking out on her shortly before New Year. At this point Beckett's meta-narrator intervenes to comment on the progress of the novel and complains that the characters have failed to be *liu liu*; they have let down the author: "Ah, these Lius and Lius! How have they stayed the course? Have they been doing their dope? ... But they will let us down, they will insist on being themselves, as soon as they are called on for a little strenuous collaboration."[31] The meta-narrator then concludes that there is no point of going on writing: "We call the whole performance off, we call the book off, it tails off in a horrid manner. The whole fabric goes unstitched. ... The music comes to pieces. The notes fly about all over the place."[32] The only decent way to end this type of realist fiction is by "deploy [ing] a curtain of silence."[33] As one can see, these metafictional comments effectively eliminate the possibility of *Dream* as a realist novel. Each time the meta-narrator intervenes, he/she acts as a narrative police officer on a cruise mission to make sure that the narrator does not fall prey to the influence of realist fiction. This is necessary because only by suppressing realist fiction is Beckett able to dramatize Belacqua's mystic inwardness and his "precarious ipsissimosity [self-referentiality]".[34] After his

[25]Beckett, *Dream*, 10.
[26]Ibid.
[27]Ibid., 11.
[28]Ibid.
[29]Ibid.
[30]Ibid., 18.
[31]Ibid., 112.
[32]Ibid., 113.
[33]Ibid.
[34]Ibid.

break-up with the Smeraldina-Rima, Belacqua wrote a piece for a Dublin magazine, in which he summarizes the ups and downs of their relationship, celebrating their transitory spiritual and affectionate communion, in which he "had her ... according to his God, i.e., the current Belacqua Jesus"[35] while he regrets her inability to hold on to such communion. Belacqua decides that the best thing to do is to move on, salvaging as many remnants as possible from his lost "love"[36] for her. This scene also marks the Smeraldina-Rima's exit from the novel, and in order to justify her disappearance, the meta-narrator intervenes again to suggest that the author could, by his will, have forced her to stay in the novel and, accordingly, drag on their relationship, but to do so would be "irresponsible" because her presence will lead to the "bursting up of our tune all along the line."[37] The tune Beckett tries to protect here is precisely the new narrative model he wants to experiment with, and the main component of this tune is Belacqua, who is alone allowed to "drift about" to "thicken this tune".[38]

The disappearance of the Smeraldina-Rima is followed by the meta-narrator's vehement assault against realist fiction, stating that all the characters in the novel cannot be treated as *liu liu* unless the author forces them to be by, for example, "organizing a [conjugal] collision"[39] of Lucien and the Syra-Cusa, which is expected to happen in realist fiction. But the meta-narrator cautions that this gesture wilfully forces "the fruit of a congruence of enormous improbability."[40] Such wilful encroachment on the characters is typical in the fiction of Balzac, who is good at putting his characters into "types"[41] with no regard to their own personality:

> To read Balzac is to receive the impression of a chloroformed world. He is absolute master of his material, he can do what he likes with it, he can foresee and calculate its least vicissitude, he can write the end of his book before he has finished the first paragraph, because he has turned all his creatures into clockwork cabbages and can rely on their staying put wherever needed or staying going at whatever direction he chooses.[42]

Beckett's parody of Balzac necessarily paves the way for his dramatization of Belacqua's complex contour of being, which consists of three layers, each as real and unreal as the other two, to show that the real Belacqua cannot be trimmed into a clockwork cabbage. Belacqua's complex and fluid being affords Beckett more ammunition to strike yet another blow on realist fiction through his meta-narrator: "Something might yet be saved from the wreck if only he [Belacqua] would

[35]Ibid., 114–15.
[36]Ibid., 114.
[37]Ibid., 115.
[38]Ibid., 117. A lover of music himself and husband of a pianist, Beckett frequently alludes to music in his other texts besides *Dream*. For comments on Beckett's use of non-Chinese music, see Bryden, *Samuel Beckett and Music*; Albright; Laws.
[39]Beckett, *Dream*, 117.
[40]Ibid.
[41]Ibid., 118.
[42]Ibid., 120.

have the goodness to fix his vibrations and be a liu on the grand scale. But he will not."[43] Belacqua simply will not be "one pure permanent liu"[44] like Charles Dickens's Miss Flite.[45] The narrative then turns to Belacqua's visit to Germany following his break-up with the Smeraldina-Rima. This account is interrupted by the meta-narrator's summary of the several foregoing episodes as a transition to the next episode—Belacqua's return to Ireland from Germany:

> Now it occurs to us that for the moment at least we have had more than enough of Belacqua the trinal maneen with his wombtomb and likes and dislikes and penny triumphs and failures and exclusions and general incompetence. ... We had fully intended to present in some detail his more notorious physical particularities. ... But now we are tired of him. We feel, we simply cannot help feeling, that the rest must wait until we can all turn to it for relief.[46]

Here we see a candid narrator, who tells the reader: look, I'm tired of writing, and I need a break; hang in there, and I'll come back.

Beckett's constant juxtaposition of narrative and meta-narrative is no doubt challenging to the reader. It is as though Beckett himself anticipated such reaction from the reader and was ready for an explanation. Such explanation was offered through Belacqua, who decides, on the ship back to Dublin, that he will write a book, in which "the phrase is self-consciously smart and slick. ... The experience of my reader shall be between the phrases, in the silence, communicated by the intervals, not the terms, of the statement, between the flowers that cannot coexist, the antithetical ... seasons of words, his experience shall be the menace, the miracle, the memory, of an unspeakable trajectory."[47] One notes that the kind of book Belacqua plans to write is precisely what Beckett actually wrote in *Dream*: the self-consciousness seen in the meta-narrator, the negation of the narrative, the silencing of realist fiction, the (meta-narrative) intervals between episodes, and the untraceable teleology of narrative.

The next woman in Belacqua's life is the Alba, whom he meets shortly after his return to Dublin. For some time, they seem to get along well; she even seems his ideal companion. Not only is she capable of commenting on his poems, calling them "too clever",[48] she carries with her a mystic milieu of silence—"the silence of body" and "the tenuous emanations of *real* personality."[49] She even seems to understand his dream of purity and manages to "appreciate his stand-offishness, his shrinking away from contact with the frail dust of her body."[50] After all, she is not in a hurry to "stir [him]"[51] because she is so spiritual that "her soul is her only poste

[43]Ibid., 125.
[44]Ibid.
[45]Dickens.
[46]Beckett, *Dream*, 133–4.
[47]Ibid., 138.
[48]Ibid., 169.
[49]Ibid., 169, emphasis added.
[50]Ibid., 176.
[51]Ibid.

restante."[52] For a while Belacqua is happily caught "in the reeds of their relations".[53] How would their relationship proceed? Would it reach a finale or closure of some kind? The meta-narrator disrupts the narrative again by mockingly stating that the author will try to create a climax to satisfy the reader: "What we are doing now, of course, is setting up the world for a proper swell slap-up explosion. The bang is better than the whimper. It is easier to do."[54] Yet, rather than being assured of a banal closure of the novel, the reader is given the hint at the absence of a banal closure by the meta-narrator's parodic tone. As for the other characters, the meta-narrator states that the author has no "plans"[55] for them at all except for "a few nebulous directions".[56] What the reader repeatedly hears from the meta-narrator is the message that Beckett the author does not know what he is doing in the novel, a message one rarely hears from an author of all times. Yet it is this message that marks *Dream*'s extreme postmodern self-consciousness and radical departure from realist fiction. But for an author to say "I don't know what I'm doing in my novel" is to admit his/her incompetence, and if the author is incompetent, why should a press publish the novel, and why should a reader read it? Writing *Dream* at a time when Beckett had rejected all other career paths and made up his mind to make a living by writing, he definitely needed his first novel to be a success and could not have ignored the high stake he placed on his metafictional self-debasement in the novel—he is too smart to bring self-destruction this way.

Beckett thus often undercuts his self-debasing metafictional comments by his ruthless mocking of realist authors and others in their company, and by his explanation through Belacqua as in the example of Belacqua's musing on how he would write his book. Not surprisingly, shortly after the meta-narrator hints at the lack of a finale for the Belacqua plotline and admits that the author has no plans for other characters, the meta-narrator evokes *liu liu* again and launches yet another attack on realist fiction and Cezanne's painting, which Beckett aligns with realist fiction because of their common emphasis on artistic proportion, whether the media is verbal or visual:

> Now once more and for the last time we are obliged to hark back to the liu business, a dreadful business, feeling heartily sorry that we ever fell into the temptation of putting up that owld Tale of a Tub concerning Christopher Ling-Liun and his bamboo Yankee doodle. Our excuse must be that we were once upon a time inclined to fancy ourself as the Cezanne ... of the printed page, very strong on architectonics. We live and learn, we draw breath from our heels now, like a pure man, and we honor our Father, our Mother, and Goethe.[57]

[52]Ibid., 177.
[53]Ibid.
[54]Ibid.
[55]Ibid., 178.
[56]Ibid., 177–8.
[57]Ibid., 179.

In this much-loaded passage, Beckett not only compares the Chinese model of *liu liu* to the narrative convention of the eighteenth century by alluding to Jonathan Swift's *Tale of a Tub* and Paul Cezanne's impressionist painting in the twentieth century,[58] but he stresses the need for a change, the need for inventing a new way to write fiction. Such need is suggested by "we live and learn", which alludes to Laloy's passage about how Chinese music evolves in the course of history. In other words, Beckett's meta-narrator is saying: look, we have come a long way to the stage where we realize that we need a breakthrough in fiction writing, just as Chinese music came a long way to embrace the freedom of expression. Beckett's meta-narrator then subtly explains the new fiction he was writing in *Dream* through his allusion to the Taoist "pure man", which appears in H. A. Giles's *The Civilization of China*, which Beckett read while preparing himself to write *Dream*. The concept of pure men is introduced by Giles in the section on Taoism, where he points out that Chuang Tzu (370–300 BCE), a disciple of Lao Tzu (born between 600 and 300 BCE), the founder of Taoism, further developed Taoism by developing the notion of pure men.[59] Chuang Tzu describes pure men this way:

> But what is a pure man? The pure men of old acted without calculation, not seeking to secure results. They laid no plans. Therefore, failing, they had no cause for regret; succeeding, no cause for congratulation. And thus they could scale heights without fear; enter water without becoming wet, and fire without feeling hot. The pure men of old slept without dreams, and waked without anxiety. They ate without discrimination, breathing deep breaths. For pure men draw breath from their heels; the vulgar from only their throats.[60]

By alluding to this passage, Beckett imagines himself acting as a Taoist pure man in writing *Dream*, the pure man in this case being a purist writer. Like a pure man who

[58]Swift.
[59]Taoism is one of the indigenous religions of China and played a role in the assimilation of Buddhism after its transmission to China. The legendary founder of Taoism is the sage Lao Tzu, to whom is attributed the authorship of the classic work the *Tao-te-ching* (*The Book of the Way and its Power*), although this probably dates to the 4th to 3rd centuries BCE. The Tao or "Way," is the all-embracing matrix of the patterns by which things happen in the world, and it is from this concept that the school derives its name. Taoists generally hold to the ideal of coming to a knowledge or vision of this matrix for a variety of purposes: to see the intricate interconnectedness of all things, to attain long life, to achieve spontaneity in thoughts and actions, to gain supernatural powers, and so on. Such achievements involve finding a balance between the two opposing energies of *yin* and *yang*, from whose interaction all phenomena and change arise. These are seen as two complementary facets of the infinite Tao, represented in the *yin-yang* symbol of a circle with two dots in each half, indicating that *yin* and *yang* both contain the seed of their opposite. All opposition and duality can be expressed in terms of *yin* and *yang*: for example, *yin* stands for what is feminine, soft, and receptive; and *yang* for what is masculine, hard, and dynamic. Taoists seek to harmonize these cosmic energies within themselves by observing and emulating the rhythms of nature, and it is an existential as opposed to an intellectual understanding that they seek. One text in particular, the *Chuang-tzu* (*c.* 4th to 2nd centuries BCE), presents a thorough critique of language as a means of communicating truth and discursive thought as a mode of knowledge, and counsels direct observation of nature, both in the world and within oneself. This will lead to a calm acceptance of the circumstances of one's life and the inevitability of one's death, and a joyous spontaneity from day to day.
[60]Quoted in Giles, 63.

lays no plans for his actions and acts without calculation and, therefore, does not secure practical results, Beckett does not write with calculation; he does not, like Balzac and Swift, manipulate his materials; nor does he care about the practical result of his writing, or if he did, he would have written *Human Comedy* or *Tale of a Tub* type of novel.[61] What Beckett exhibits here is his clever appropriation of Taoist ethics and his extremely creative conflation of such ethics and his own postmodern aesthetics.

Beckett's repeated metafictional allusion to the *liu liu* story and parody of realist fiction adequately prepares the reader for what seems an unheroic ending of the novel. After his laboured negotiations with the Alba over the possibility of purely spiritual love, Belacqua still fails to persuade her to pursue a purist path, yet he goes on to yearn for her company. Belacqua's last interaction with the Alba vividly illustrates such a dilemma of his: while he cannot resist her invitation to tea and secretly wishes to "fit his nape against her thigh",[62] he "sits on the floor with his back turned to her"[63] to show his resolution not to yield to her possible further demand. The novel ends with Belacqua coming out of her place and slowly walking back to Dublin. On the one hand, the novel ends with a sense of failure, a sense deriving from Belacqua's failed endeavours to transform the Smeraldina-Rima and the Alba. On the other hand, the novel ends with a sense of hope, a sense deriving from the narrator's hopeful tone and from the magical effect on Belacqua of a mysterious voice. Belacqua's dejected mood, after coming out of her place, is vividly and symbolically brought out by the darkness of the sky and by his inability to see any light: "When Belacqua came out ... no moon was to be seen nor stars of any kind. There was no light in the sky whatsoever. At least he could not discover any."[64] However, Belacqua's low spirit is underscored by the narrator's sure affirmation of hope, which foreshadows Belacqua's return to hope: "there was *some* light, of course there was, it being well-known that perfect black is simply not to be had."[65] The narrator then sympathetically explains why Belacqua could not see any light: "But he was in no state of mind to be concerned with any such punctilio. The heavens, he said to himself, are darkened, absolutely, beyond any possibility of error."[66] The sense of hope is also symbolically suggested by the call of a mysterious voice that urges him to move on. At the call of this voice, Belacqua is magically transformed; his mood brightens, his feet stop hurting, and he is eager to move on: "Scarcely had he made to employ them [his hands] on his face when a voice, slightly more in sorrow than in anger this time, enjoined him to move on, which the pain being so much better, he was too happy to do."[67] Belacqua's miracle, which closes the novel, raises an

[61]Balzac; Swift.
[62]Beckett, *Dream*, 235.
[63]Ibid., 238.
[64]Ibid., 240.
[65]Ibid.
[66]Ibid.
[67]Ibid., 241.

interesting question about Beckett's relationship with postmodernism. I have suggested earlier in the essay that Beckett's experiment with metafiction in *Dream* aligns him with postmodernist fiction that questions fiction's stable ontology and submits it to endless deferral of truth. I have also suggested that Beckett's negotiation with realist fiction does not result in the total negation of the real, but in locating the real in the inner reality seen as unruly mystic, thus irreducible to logical and neat identification. *Dream*'s closure thus powerfully illustrates Beckett's complex relationship with and discriminating appropriation of postmodernism.[68] By allowing Belacqua to experience the miracle and by allowing him to overcome his disillusion about women, Beckett performs a double transgression of realist aesthetics and postmodernist aesthetics to the extent that the novel's miraculous coda derives from Belacqua's own "system",[69] not from the author's wilful arrangement, and that such coda affirms *Dream*'s mystic ontology by affirming the positive meaning of Belacqua's mystic quest. In this sense, Beckett may be called a mystic realist, just as his modernist contemporaries can be called psychological realists. Beckett's own aesthetics in *Dream* emerges precisely in his unwavering transgression of realist aesthetics and in his simultaneous appropriation and revision of postmodernist aesthetics. The formation of the Beckettian aesthetics, as I have demonstrated in this essay, is made possible by Beckett's innovative appropriation of Chinese music.

References

Albright, Daniel. "Beckett as Marsyas." In *Samuel Beckett and the Arts: Music, Visual Arts, and Non-Print Media*, edited by Lois Oppenheim, Foreword by Daniel Albright. New York: Garland, 1999.

Balzac, Honoré de. *The Human Comedy*. New York: P.F. Collier, 1893.

Beckett, Samuel. "Whoroscope." Paris: The Hours Press, 1930.

———. *Proust*. New York: Grove Press, 1931.

———. *More Pricks than Kicks*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1934.

———. *Murphy*. New York: Grove Press, 1938.

———. *Watt*. New York: Grove Press, 1953.

———. *Trilogy*. New York: Grove Press, 1958.

———. "Dante ... Bruno. Vico ... Joyce." In *Disjecta*, edited by Rubin Cohen. New York: Grove Press, 1984.

[68]I have noted that critics do not agree on which of Beckett's fictions are modernist and which are postmodernist. For Susan Brienza, Brian Richardson, and Inger Christensen, Beckett's later fiction starting from *Trilogy*, is definitely postmodern. For McHale, it is *Trilogy* alone that marks Beckett's entrance into the postmodern domain. As he writes: "Samuel Beckett makes the transition from modernist to postmodernist poetics in the course of his trilogy of novels of the early 1950s" (McHale, 12). For Brian Finney, however, all Beckett's fictions can be assimilated into the postmodern category, as his entry on Beckett's fiction titled "Samuel Beckett's Postmodern Fictions" indicates. My own sense is that there are postmodern elements in all of Beckett's fictions; his play with language and his assault against realist fiction in them is a matter of degree rather than one of absence and presence. In other words, we find such play and assault more radical in some of his fictions (e.g., *Dream*, *Trilogy*) than in others (e.g., *Murphy*, *Watt*). But to exclude all the non-trilogy fictions from postmodern aesthetics, as McHale does, and to exclude all the fictions written prior to *Trilogy* from postmodern aesthetics, as Brienza, Richardson, and Christensen do, is certainly inadequate.
[69]Beckett, *Dream*, 240.

———. *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. New York: Arcade Publishing, 1992.
———. *Beckett's Dream Notebook*. Edited by John Pilling. Reading: Beckett International Foundation, 1999.
Ben-Zvi, Linda, ed. *Women in Beckett: Performance and Critical Perspective*. Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1990.
Brienza, Susan. *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds: Style in Metafiction*. Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987.
———. "Clods, Whores and Bitches: Misogyny in Beckett's Early Fiction." In *Women in Beckett: Performance and Critical Perspectives*, edited by Linda Ben-Zvi. Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1990.
Bryden, Mary. *Women in Samuel Beckett's Prose and Drama: Her Own Other*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993.
———. *Samuel Beckett and Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
Christensen, Inger. *The Meaning of Metafiction*. Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1981.
Dickens, Charles. *Bleak House*. London: Oxford UP, 1948.
Finney, Brian. "Samuel Beckett's Postmodern Fictions." In *The Columbia History of British Novel*, edited by John Richetti. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
Giles, H.A. *The Civilization of China*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1911.
Joyce, James. *Ulysses* (1922). New York: Vintage Books, 1986.
Knowlson, James. *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996.
Laloy, Louis. *La Musique Chinoise*. Translated by Laura D. Hawley. Hollywood, Calif.: W. M. Hawley Publications, 1993. Originally published between 1900 and 1910.
———. *Mirror of China*. Translated by Catherine A. Phillips. New York: Alfred. A. Knopf, 1936.
———. *Louis Laloy on Debbusy, Ravel, and Stravinsky*. Translated by Deborah Priest. Brookfield, Vt.: Ashgate, 1999.
Landa, Jose Angel Garcia. "'Till nohow on:' The Later Metafiction of Samuel Beckett." In *British Postmodern Fiction*, edited by Theo D'haenand Hans Bertens. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993.
Laws, Catherine. "The Double Image of Music in Beckett's Early Fiction." *Samuel Beckett Today* 9 (2000): 295–308.
Lin, Lidan. "From Quigley the Writer to Murphy the Job Seeker: Beckett's Evolving Vision of Characters and Plots in *Murphy*." *English Studies: A Journal of English Language and Literature* 87, no. 3 (2006): 319–26.
McHale, Brian. *Postmodernist Fiction*. London: Routledge, 1993.
Pilling, John. "Beckett's English Fiction." In *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, edited by John Pilling. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
Priest, Deborah. "Introduction and Notes." In *Louis Laloy on Debbusy, Ravel, and Stravinsky*, translated by Deborah Priest. Brookfield, Vt.: Ashgate, 1999.
Proust, Marcel. *Remembrance of Things Past*. Translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff, introduced by Joseph Wood Krutch. New York: Random House, 1934.
Richardson, Brian. "Causality in *Molloy*: Philosophic Theme, Narrative Transgression, and Metafictional Paradox." *Style* 26, no. 1 (1992): 66–78.
Swift, Jonathan. *A Tale of a Tub*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958.
Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse*. New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1927.

English Studies
Vol. 91, No. 3, May 2010, 303–327

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Judging the Degree of Adjectivization of English Nouns: An Investigation of the Discourse Behaviour of a Sample of Frequent Premodifier Nouns

Pierre J. L. Arnaud

Some English nouns are frequently used as premodifiers and seem to have acquired adjectival characteristics, which appear in dictionaries in labels such as adj. *or* modif. *To investigate them, the characteristics of adjectives are contrasted with those of nouns. Semantically, attributive adjectives bring a unidimensional, incident type of modification to the head noun, and "adjectival" nouns have undergone semic reduction, which produces a similar kind of modification. Core adjectives also have a range of typical functions and constructions which provide criteria for the possible adjectival conversion of nouns. Corresponding occurrences for a core adjective, a "pure" noun, and the adjectival member of an old noun/adjective pair were searched in the* British National Corpus *and, if absent, on the Web. A series of six subjectively "adjectival" nouns was then similarly investigated, showing a variety of behaviours. The data are synthesized into an adjectivity score with potential use in lexicography.*

1. Introduction

The head of a noun phrase may be premodified by an adjective as in *a tall man* or by a noun as in *a mystery man*. The purpose of this article is to examine the notion of conversion by reporting on an investigation of some nouns that frequently occur as prenominal modifiers and subjectively appear to share some of the characteristics of adjectives or even to have become members of that class. Such nouns often have dictionary subentries labelled *adj.* or *as modifier*. Before we examine the corpus behaviour of these apparently hybrid units, we will investigate the natures of adjectivity and nominality and then validate this investigation by contrasting corpus data on a purely adjectival unit with those on a purely nominal one.

Pierre J. L. Arnaud is affiliated with the Department of English, University Lumière, Lyon, France.

ISSN 0013-838X (print)/ISSN 1744-4217 (online) © 2010 Taylor & Francis